



By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak  
COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I’m a mid-level manager and I can’t wait until I’m a top-level manager because they get to avoid working with difficult people. I can sometimes avoid them but other times I can’t and have to deal with their pessimistic, territorial, and egotistical traits that make me sick to my stomach to come to work sometimes. How do such people get promoted? Why do my superiors want these people as managers? Please help me cope.

DEJECTED MANAGER



DEAR DEJECTED MANAGER: I can understand how you feel. Difficult people make life challenging, that’s for sure. How these people get promoted in their work fields is a mystery to me. Why organizational leaders let some of these morale-busting sour apples be in charge is beyond comprehension. Usually this happens because leaders failed to establish or enforce a value system or a culture that doesn’t consist of these types of people. Basically, their human resource department isn’t hiring good fits for the organization.

Despite this leadership shortcoming, you can’t let the difficult people in your organization drag you down into their negative abyss. You can certainly avoid their back-stabbing, stubborn ways that bring organizational progress to

## Make difficult people your ally

a screeching halt by being better than them and exhibiting positive relations with all people with whom you come in contact.

First, you are correct about the power given to people at the top and middle, but just imagine (and remember) the poor person at the bottom--they get no choice in the matter concerning their workmates. Their frustration levels are probably higher than yours I’m sure.

One effective way for you (and others) to overcome these frustrations, regardless of status level in the organization, is to exert good leadership skills, particularly in the interpersonal area. Yes, anyone can be a leader, no matter who they are or what they do. And good leaders will find ways to succeed with people who are hard to work with. Why? Because it benefits the organization. How do they do it? By finding some kind of common ground and using it to connect with the difficult person.

When I had to deal with difficult people during my career, I would figure out something we both had in common. Whether we were from the same state, drove the same kind of car, cheered for the same sports team, or liked the same types of food, etc., there was always something I could find out that I could bring up at the precise time to manipulate a conversation and get us both talking and agreeing about something. This tactic set the tone for a

cooperative spirit as we moved to more official topics concerning the business at hand.

Why does this tactic work? Because it breaks barriers of defensiveness and opens gates of trust. Difficult people have a tendency to lighten up with people they like or with whom they have similar tastes or interests. For example, a difficult person is more likely to have empathy and understanding with another person after they just discussed the good food they both ate at a restaurant.

So do your homework and learn about the difficult people in your organization. Talk to the people they associate with and find out what they like or dislike, are interested in or not interested in. When you discover something that is common ground with you, take note of it and find a way to work that information into your next conversation with them. I’ll bet their attitude toward you will begin to change in no time. And soon, those difficult people will become cooperative people, or at least people you don’t have to be sick to your stomach about when you go to work.



*For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to [www.DearChiefAdvice.com](http://www.DearChiefAdvice.com) and submit your comments or email them to [Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com](mailto:Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com).*